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A Bimonthly
Indiana NRCS Newsletter

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Issue 50

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Heart to Heart with Hardisty

It's hard to believe we are already halfway through fiscal year 2014. While there still are a few unknowns, we continue to push through and provide the quality service NRCS is known for.



I wanted to start out by giving a “kudos” to another great Indiana Conservation Partnership opportunity. The state Nutrient Reduction Strategy represents an inclusive effort to capture present and future endeavors in Indiana which positively impact the state's waters. The strategy was authored with input from the Indiana Conservation Partnership as well as members of the agricultural community and several other organizations. This document will serve to illustrate the significance and achievements of the Indiana Conservation Partnership and its member entities as an invaluable resource in addressing Hoosiers' water quality challenges and concerns. Thanks to all that taken time to be involved in this partnership.



Jane Hardisty
State Conservationist



Although you may not be hearing much about the Administrative Solutions Project (ASP), I wanted to inform you that lots of great things are going on behind the scene. New local support staff will be determined in the next few months and National Service Delivery Team positions will be advertised later this year. This is a great opportunity for NRCS to strengthen our ability to deliver conservation to our customers and partners.



As usual, Indiana NRCS employees are doing great things! We've had a lot of challenges over the past year and I want to commend all of Indiana's NRCS offices for a job well done. Our employees are working hard with landowners to get conservation plans and easements ready for approval and obligation of Farm Bill dollars. I encourage you to continue working with landowners in putting conservation on the ground and improving our natural resources.

Jane E. Hardisty

**** * * Employee Spotlight * * * ***

Tien Tran, Lebanon CIT Engineering Technician



Q: As one of the newest NRCS employees, please help us get to know you better. Tell us a little bit about yourself.

For most of my life, I grew up in Virginia. Before that I moved around a lot but don't remember most of my younger years. I joined the military right after high school because, at

the time, I had no idea what I wanted to do in life and it seemed like a good fit. While waiting to swear my oath, 9/11 happened. I didn't know what was going on. I thought it was just an accident at the time, unfortunately I found out later it was a terrorist attack. Throughout my military career, I've been involved in multiple deployments; each has its own unique experience. For the most part, the military help me mature into who I am today. Sometimes I wonder what would happen if I had taken the path of college, but life can't be full of regrets and the experience, friends, and proud heritage of being part of the US Air Force is something that I greatly cherish.

Q: How did you become interested in conservation?

I didn't know much about conservation until I was notified that I was receiving medical discharge due to issues related to my deployment. For about three months, I was frantically searching for a job that fit my skills. Most private sector employers are looking for both a bachelor's degree and "on the job" experience. While I do have an associate's degree, I found it still wasn't enough for the private sector. My best option was to expand my search. At first I thought I was getting a position with Bureau of Land Management, but due to the government shutdown, I was left in the dark for three weeks. With patience and living on a diet of

Ramen Noodles, I found a position with NRCS. I like the idea that we are helping restore the land. When I was offered the position, I accepted it without a second thought.

Q: I understand you worked in Montana for a little while. Can you tell us about your position there and what you'll miss most?

I was relocated to Montana because of my military career with the US Air Force. The position I held at the time was an engineering technician with a mobile civil construction team. When we work at home, our customers were mostly military bases located around the United States. We worked with several European and Middle Eastern Countries when deployed. Most of my work consisted of civil constructions, repairing and building runways, storage facilities, and office buildings for military bases. One of things I miss most is being able to travel around the world and experience the many different cultures.

Q: Do you have any professional or personal goals for 2014?

My professional goal is to absorb as much as I can, learn as much as I can, and work to my best abilities since my first year is on probation. I'd rather give the agency a reason to keep me then the reverse. As far as personal goals, I don't have anything specific. My long term goal is to be able to travel around the world just for vacation/fun.

Q: Do you have any hobbies or special interests that you can tell us about?

When I'm off duty and we have good weather, I like to take a cruise on my motorcycle. I also enjoy most outdoor activities like camping, paintball, hiking, and sometimes golfing. One day, I would like to travel around the world but without the heavy gear and body armor I used while deployed with the Air Force.

Hoosier Happenings

KUDOS TO:

Mark Cambron, District Conservationist, for his presentation in Evansville's "Big Read Program" on *The Grapes of Wrath*. Mark closed out the program by discussing efforts to modify farming practices after the Depression that continue to the present. - **Anne Statham, Big Read Coordinator**

Susan Meadows, Natural Resources Specialist, for assisting California in developing their state leadership development program. Susan has been instrumental in providing assistance to Kay Joy Barge and Jim Spears who are co-leads in California's effort to establish a state leadership program. They are using Susan's materials and framework and adapting it to their needs. My sincere thanks to Susan for her outstanding help.—**Carlos Suarez, California State Conservationist**

Celia Tharp, District Conservationist and Pulaski County SWCD staff and Board Members for organizing a successful Soil Health Field Day. Farmers, conservationists, and implement dealers worked to bring potentially conflicting participants together. Barry Fisher presented conservation efforts to improve soil health throughout the year and Bane-Welker and Greenmark brought in representatives from Case IH, Krause Equipment, Great Plains, Landoll and Kverneland to showcase their vertical tillage tools. The dealers sent personal invitations to the event that drew a diverse crowd of conventional and conservation tillage farmers. There was a lot of anxiety over partnering these groups but in the end it worked out well.—**Susannah Hinds, Soil Conservationist**

Jayson Mas, District Conservationist, for his professionalism and enthusiastic attitude at the Jay County field day. - **Steve Howell, IDEM Ag Liaison**

Bill Lambert, District Conservationist, for attending and participating in a wetland violation meeting. He was very professional and did a good job.—**Kelley Barkell, District Conservationist**

Ben Ashbaugh, CIT Leader, his stupendous help with the Conservation Stewardship Program.—**Kelley Barkell, District Conservationist**

SALEM OFFICE RECEIVES CHIEF'S AWARD

It was a huge workload for any field office – over 300 requests for highly erodible determinations in three months. Because of office workload with requests for technical assistance and other Farm Bill programs, District Conservationist Ruth Hackman was concerned about meeting the deadlines. So Ruth turned to Earth Team Volunteer Levi Shelton for assistance.

Levi became an Earth Team Volunteer in 2012 to learn about NRCS and its services and programs. In his time as a volunteer, Levi has become familiar with work processes and after a few training sessions he was ready for the assignment of assisting with the HEL determinations. Levi set up case files and customer files in the agency's on-line tracking system (which requires information such as location, conservation plan, soil maps, etc.), completed NRCS-CPA-026s based on determinations made by soil conservationists who visited sites, and he prepared and mailed correspondence and documents to landowners.

During a two-month period, Levi donated over 281 hours, most of which came in long days. His hours of service saved NRCS staff valuable time, which helped the District Conservationist meet the HEL determination deadlines and allowed Conservation Technical Team Soil Conservationists to focus their attention priority field work. If you equate his time at a professional fee rate of \$22.14 per hour, Levi provided more \$6,200 in services to the agency.

Hackman would like to see other NRCS field staff using Earth Team Volunteers when they have time consuming tasks that need to be completed in very short timeframes. She hopes that by sharing Levi's accomplishments she can encourage NRCS staff to recruit other volunteers that interested in making a difference.



Levi Shelton prepares paperwork for HEL determinations

Hoosier Happenings (cont.)

SPECIAL EMPHASIS: FEDERAL WOMENS MONTH

Submitted by Brianne Lowe, SEPM—Federal Women's Emphasis

On March 6, 2014, Indiana celebrated Women's History Month at the NRCS State Office with a brunch meeting and presentation. This year's theme was *Women of Character, Courage, and Commitment*, and was marked by a celebration of the women in Indiana's Conservation Partnership. Jane Hardisty, the first female State Conservationist in Indiana, opened the meeting remarking on the demographic changes that have occurred in USDA over the past decades, and noted the inspirational force of the dedicated female employees. She also noted that there is still room for improvement nationally in encouraging the retention and advancement female employees in NRCS. Julie Wickard, the first female State Executive Director for FSA in Indiana, also opened the meeting, sharing her journey through agriculture, and the inspiration she has received from females in the profession. The resounding theme of the meeting was not that female employees seek special recognition because of their gender, but that all employees, regardless of who they are, want a fair opportunity to achieve their goals in safe environment.

A recent study published in Nextgov and produced by the Center for Talent Innovation has shown that despite women making up 50% of science, technology, and engineering field graduates, over 1/3 reported they feel stalled or are leaving the profession entirely due to marginalization. Retention of women employees at NRCS has a renewed focus for the Federal Women's Special Emphasis Program nationwide. This year's Women's History Month celebration was one activity to focus on this effort. The celebration concluded with a 15-minute slideshow presentation highlighting women from around the state and the Conservation Partnership. Over 44 women were represented. The presentation was an opportunity to highlight all of the positive contributions female employees are making to their families, community, and natural resources. It was also an opportunity to open the dialogue on retention issues within the profession and encourage female employees to achieve their goals and break through any gender barriers that remain. The 2014 Women's History Month presentation is available on the Indiana Federal Women's Program website: http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/in/about/civilrights/?cid=nrcs144p2_031111

If you have questions about the Women's History Month celebration, or the Federal Women's Special Emphasis Program, please contact Brianne Lowe, Federal Women's Program Manager at Brianne.lowe@in.usda.gov.

MANAGING FOR EXCELLENCE TRAINING HELD

Another round of Managing for Excellence was held March 18-20 at the State Office. There were nineteen students in attendance whose careers with NRCS range from a few months to several years. Participants received an overview of the functions of management; techniques to recognize and develop personal behavioral tendencies; establish and maintain relationships with conservation districts and other organizations; and develop skills to manage change and conflict in groups. Upon completion of this training, participants were able to:

- Explain, demonstrate and apply the major principles and concepts of management in a NRCS work unit.
- Explain and explore the impact of managing change, group development, and personal and group behavior.
- Demonstrate and apply networking and communication skills to effectively accomplish the mission of NRCS.

Participants also networked and learned more about their coworkers through various team building activities.



*Managing for Excellence Students work on team building activity.
L-R: Chris Shoults, Tien Tran, John Wigent, Lori Beeker*

Partnership Links

IN Association of Soil & Water Conservation Districts, Bi-Weekly

Updates: www.iaswcd.org/whatsnew/index.html

IN Conservation Partnership: <http://icp.iaswcd.org>

IN Dept. of Environmental Management: www.in.gov/idem

IN Dept. of Natural Resources: www.in.gov/dnr

IN State Dept. of Agriculture, Division of Soil Conservation:

<http://www.in.gov/isda/soil/>

Purdue University: www.purdue.edu

USDA Farm Service Agency: www.fsa.usda.gov

Hoosier Happenings (cont.)

NRCS EMPLOYEES ASSIST PURDUE AG STUDENTS

Two Indiana NRCS employees are receiving special thanks from several Purdue Agricultural and Biological Engineering (ABE) students.

Mike Wigginton, NW Area Soil Scientist, assisted Purdue ABE students John Tyler Moore and Kyle Keaffaber with a soils investigation for their Senior Capstone project titled “Water Management for Pinney Purdue Agricultural Center Muck Soils.” The students were very impressed with Mike’s knowledge of soils and appreciative of his on-site assistance and mentoring.



L-R: Kyle Keaffaber, Mike Wigginton,
John Tyler Moore

Jeff Cannaday, NW Area Engineer, also provided assistance to two Purdue ABE Students during this past year by serving as an advisor to the five environmental Senior Capstone projects at various times during the fall

and spring on campus. Jeff assisted Patrick Glassman and Kirsten Paff with their Senior Capstone project titled “Restoration of Water Control Structures in Happy Hollow Park” by providing GIS assistance on the drainage areas, runoff curves and design storms for their project. Both students appreciated the time Jeff spent with them to help them complete their project. Patrick Glassman was an NRCS SCEP and will be joining NRCS full time this summer at the Peru Field Office.

FISCAL YEAR 2013 ANNUAL REPORT AVAILABLE

The Fiscal Year 2013 Indiana NRCS Report is now available online at <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/in/newsroom/factsheets/>! Please take time to read through the report and share it with our landowners and partners at the local level.

With all the challenges we encountered last year--a continuing resolution, impending government shutdown, budget uncertainty, administrative transformation, farm bill negotiations, etc.—the accomplishments in this report are a testimony to our strong Indiana Conservation Partnership and our ability to get conservation on the ground.

Take the Survey! May 2014 - June 2014

Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey



FEDERAL EMPLOYEE VIEWPOINT SURVEY

Never before have I been so proud to be a part of NRCS. Our agency is listening to us in lots of ways and not only are they listening, they are making changes based on our input. We are making efforts to do that here in Indiana as well, with our Operations Improvement Teams, standing committees, and other means.



Another way that employees can share their perspectives, ideas and give voice to their concerns is through the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (FEVS). A random subset of NRCS employees across the country will receive the survey by email from the Office of Personnel Management beginning May 5th. Those who receive it can make a difference by completing the survey and sharing their thoughts about work experiences at NRCS. The survey is **voluntary and anonymous**.

I can tell you USDA and NRCS take the feedback from these surveys very seriously. This survey is the only broad-based means to help NRCS leadership understand how well we are doing in making our agency one of the federal government’s best places to work and invest in a career.

Whether you work in the field, area, technical team, or state office we want to hear from you! If you are selected to take the survey, I encourage you to take the necessary time to complete it.

Our employees here in Indiana are the best—your dedication and professionalism makes me very proud. Keep up the good work and let us hear from you.

~ Jane Hardisty

PERSONNEL UPDATE

SELECTIONS FROM VACANCY ANNOUNCEMENTS

Chad Schotter selected for the District Conservationist at the Warsaw Field Office effective 4-20-14
Shasta Woodard selected for the District Conservationist at the Brownstown Field Office effective 5-20-14
Cara Bergschneider selected for the District Conservationist at the Bloomington Field Office effective 6-15-14
Kevin Shide selected for the District Conservationist at the Rensselaer Field Office effective 6-15-14

RETIREMENTS

William Elliott, CIT Leader, on the Greencastle CIT Office effective 5-2-14

Historical Photo of the Issue



As the Public Affairs staff continues to sort through filing cabinets of old photos to archive, we thought it would be fun to share some of our favorites and the descriptions that were included with each photo.

DATE: July, 1972

LOCATION: Noble County, Indiana

TITLE: Conservation Practices

DESCRIPTION: This photo shows strip cropping oats and corn on Morley silty clay loam with a C slope.

Mark Your Calendar

May

- 13: Northeast Area Meeting
SAC/FAC Meeting
- 14: Southeast Area Meeting
- 21: Leadership Team Meeting
- 28: Southwest Area Meeting
Northwest Area Meeting

June

- 3—5: Leadership Development Program Meeting
- 3: Northeast Area Meeting
- 4: Certified Planners Evaluation

June, Continued

- 6: Hoosier Chapter of Soil and Water Conservation Society Meeting
- 10: SAC/FAC Meeting
- 11: Southeast Area Meeting
National Drainage Water Training
- 12: National Drainage Water Training
Civil Rights Committee
- 17: Indiana Conservation Partnership Meeting
- 18: Leadership Team Meeting
- 24: Northwest Area Meeting
- 25: Southwest Area Meeting
- 26-27: Mentor/Protégé Orientation



You can find up-to-date information about upcoming events on the Indiana SharePoint site at:
<https://nrsc.sc.egov.usda.gov/central/in/Lists/Calendar/calendar.aspx>